



CONCORDIS PAPERS VIII

Christian Churches and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

February 2010

Third Edition



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Introduction

Rt Hon Viscount Brentford

Concordis International has worked—not always under that name—for over 25 years to build sustainable and just peace in areas suffering from war, by developing relationships between key individuals on all sides of violent conflict and helping them together to find constructive ways forward. Our field of experience includes South Africa, Rwanda, Sudan, Kenya and Afghanistan. With respect to the Middle East, we have so far limited ourselves to the relatively modest ambitions that available funding has allowed.

This paper is the eighth in a series which seeks to build on the strengths of the Concordis approach through spreading understanding of issues and the multilateral consensus developed in consultations, primarily connected with the conflicts in Sudan. Over the years, a host of consultations have been held on a wide range of themes, each with its own unique set of presentations, discussions, conclusions and recommendations.

This booklet results from a consultation we held in Cambridge, England, in September 2009 on *The Role of British Churches in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. Participating—in their personal capacities—were theologians, church leaders, academics and activists holding a spectrum of views on the issues. Our aim is both to provide wider access to the main content of presentations made at our consultations and to draw together the range of views expressed by participant in a succinct and readable form. Apart from the ‘guest article’ by Dr Munayer, the content of this paper represents a balanced selection of the presentations and discussion at the consultation, not necessarily the opinions of Concordis International. Authors are of course responsible for their own contributions, but Concordis takes overall editorial responsibility.

In addition to the articles from the contributors listed on page 26, we have of course received much helpful advice and input from those who attended the September consultation and from many others. We are grateful to all.

Concordis Papers are available for download from our website and are disseminated widely to those interested in the specific subject matter. I hope you will find them a useful resource.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brentford".

Maps Old and New



Maps: The World Factbook



Mosaic map of Jerusalem, Madaba. Photo: © CC spdl_n1

A Note on the Purpose of this Booklet

Peter Dixon, Chief Executive, Concordis International

Those who know Concordis International from other contexts will be aware that we do not espouse a particular point of view, be it political or theological. Rather, we exist to bring all strands of opinion into contact with each other in an atmosphere of cooperation, in the hope that the quantity of light generated may exceed that of heat.

In the situations of violent conflict with which we normally engage, this happy situation does not always prevail. We did not expect violence at our Cambridge consultation for British church leaders and others in September. Nevertheless, I was impressed by the amount of mutual comprehension between the wide range of viewpoints represented. It seemed right, to those present and to us, to make this rich spectrum of knowledge and opinion available to a wider audience. Hence this booklet, which was originally published for UK churches but in the 3rd Edition is provided for wider application.

We hope that the articles we present are both accessible and thought-provoking. Building on the historical and political foundations laid by Christopher Catherwood and Fiona McCallum, the articles by Calvin Smith, Chris Rose and Ben White set out the stalls of the main opposing Christian views on conflict in the Holy Land. Richard Harvey's mini-survey of theological perspectives on the conflict helpfully positions these views within a spectrum of approaches. Meanwhile, Mike Fuller, Geoffrey Smith and Jerry Marshall take an essentially pragmatic approach to the conflict in their respective calls for constructive engagement as peacemakers. Finally, recognising that the consultation lacked an authentic voice from the region, we count ourselves privileged to include an article by Salim Munayer, the Director of an organisation that spans the divide.

The consultation itself was born of a conviction that theological difference has prevented the churches from fulfilling the role of peacemakers in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are other barriers to the performance of this mission, notably the difficult situations in which Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews find themselves. Yet it is difficult not to agree with Salim Munayer that the churches have been unsuccessful in "acting as a bridge across the gap of suspicion and hatred". Perhaps we Christians from outside the region need to examine our own past and current role in this.

Who should read these articles? I suspect that any Christian, whatever the denomination, whose knowledge of the issues is less than perfect will learn something, particularly about those with whom he or she does not agree. There may be much here with which you disagree. Nevertheless, we at Concordis hope that this short document will be a useful tool in the learning process for many.

A Chronology

Prepared from an original chronology by Christopher Catherwood and other sources.

c. 1950 BC Abraham leaves Sumer (in modern Iraq) for Canaan.

c. 1000-961 BC Reign of David.

c. 961-922 BC Reign of Solomon.

c. 922 BC Israel divided into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

332 BC Alexander the Great conquers Jerusalem

63 BC Roman conquest of Jerusalem

c.6-4 BC Birth of Jesus

AD

c.70 Herod's Temple destroyed.

7th Century Muslim Arab armies moved North from Arabia to conquer most of the Middle East, including Palestine.

1099-1187 Crusaders establish the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Mid 1200s-1517 Mamelukes established an empire including the area of Palestine.

16th-19th Century Palestine under Ottoman rule as part of (southern) Syria.

19th Century Jewish communities and families, mostly from Eastern Europe, fleeing increasing anti-Semitism and pogroms in Europe, begin to immigrate in increasing numbers to Palestine.

1882 Baron Edmond de Rothschild begins financial backing of Jewish immigration in Palestine.

1891 First Palestinian protest against Zionist aims.

1896 Publication of "Der Judenstaat" by Austrian Zionist leader Theodor Herzl, advocating creation of Jewish state in Argentina or Palestine.

1913 First Arab Nationalist Congress meets in Paris.

1914-18 World War I. Ottoman state enters the war on the side of Germany.

1915 Hussein-McMahon Correspondence promises an Arab state in return for revolt against the Turks.

November 1917 Balfour Declaration: [British] government would "view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people".

March 1922 Britain divides the Mandate area into Palestine and Transjordan, giving Hashemites control over Transjordan.

1936-1939 Arab revolt.

August 1947 Seelisberg Declaration on the Holocaust by Christian participants at International Conference of Christians and Jews.

November 1947 UN Partition Plan accepted by Jewish leaders, rejected by Arab leaders.

May 1948 State of Israel declared. Arab armies attack new Jewish state. Arab-Israeli War lasts for 13 months. About 700,000 Palestinian Arabs become refugees. Jewish refugees from Arab lands flee to Israel.

1949 Under armistice, territory of British Mandate divided between the State of Israel, Jordan and Egypt.

June 1967 Six-Day War: Pre-emptive Israeli attack against Egyptian Air Force. Israel defeats Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq and captures Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, West Bank and Golan Heights.

September 1967 Khartoum Resolution of Arab Summit—no peace, no recognition, no negotiations with Israel.

October 1973 Yom Kippur War: Surprise attack by Syria and Egypt in Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula, supported by Jordan, Iraq, and other Arab nations.

December 1987 Start of First Intifada, creation of Hamas.

August 1993 Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin sign Oslo Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government.

September 2000 Start of Second Intifada.

March 2002 Israeli forces begin Operation Defensive Shield. Suicide bomb attacks in Israel.

April 2002 Israeli troops occupy Bethlehem. Palestinian gunmen occupy Church of the Nativity.

June 2002 Israel begins construction of the West Bank “Security Barrier”. Palestinian terror attacks on Israelis subsequently drop by 90%.

April 2003 Quartet on the Middle East announces Road Map for peace.

July 2004 International Court of Justice rules the Israeli West Bank barrier illegal, in a non-binding advisory opinion.

January 2006 Hamas wins landslide majority in Palestinian legislative election.

September 2006 UN study declares humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip “intolerable”—an estimated 80% of the population living below the poverty line.

June 2007 Battle of Gaza begins—Hamas takes control of Gaza Strip from Fatah.

Dec 2008/Jan 2009 Israel launches Operation Cast Lead against Hamas and enforces subsequent blockade of Gaza.



Tank, Golan Heights, Photo: © CC M Falsey

Current Political Background to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Dr Fiona McCallum

At the start of the 1990s, conditions were seen as favourable towards a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Having fought in previous wars against Israel (1948, 1967 and 1973), the Arab states had disengaged from actively participating in reclaiming Palestine with Egypt signing a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. Under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) sought to be regarded as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and in 1988, accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242—a two-state solution—and renounced terrorism.

Against the background of the Intifada, a spontaneous uprising beginning in 1987 in the Palestinian Territories against Israeli occupation, and the regional environment created by the US-led coalition victory against the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein in 1990, the international community organised the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991. Simultaneously, secret talks were held between Israeli and PLO representatives in Oslo and led to the Declaration of Principles in 1993 which has been the framework for further negotiations. This agreement recognised the two-state solution, set up a Palestinian Self-Governing Authority and deferred controversial issues to final status negotiations i.e. Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements and borders. Arafat was elected president of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1996 and returned to the Palestinian Territories. The peace process was derailed due to the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, suicide bombings orchestrated by Hamas (a Palestinian Islamist group opposed to the agreement) and the election of a right-wing Israeli government in 1996 led by Benjamin Netanyahu.

The Camp David summit in 2000 was seen as a last attempt to solve the conflict, but talks broke down over final status issues and negotiations were halted with the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000. Further progress has been conditional on the cessation of Palestinian violence before any measures are taken by Israel.



Current Obstacles to Peace

- SETTLEMENTS** Israeli settlements continue to be built in East Jerusalem and parts of the West Bank although unauthorised outposts are dismantled and routinely re-erected. The cessation of settlement building is a major Palestinian condition but the Netanyahu government has granted permits for building in existing settlements. The unilateral disengagement from Gaza under the Sharon government did not lead to an improvement in the security situation in Southern Israel.
- RIGHT OF RETURN** This is a key Palestinian demand as it is perceived as recognition of their loss of homeland and property as well as their status as ‘victims’. Both sides have yet to agree on a unified version of the events which led to the refugee situation (voluntary or expelled). The physical right of return would change the structure of Israel as a Jewish state but neighbouring Arab states have opposed permanent residence for the refugees. Solely financial compensation has been discussed.
- JERUSALEM** There is still no agreement on sovereignty over the Old City. This difficult issue is intensified due to the religious importance of the Holy Places to all three monotheistic faiths.
- LIFE IN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES** The Oslo Accords were seen as a step towards having a Palestinian state and Palestinians expected to see immediate improvements in their security and economic conditions. This did not occur and the consequences of the second Intifada include restrictions on movement within the Palestinian Territories through checkpoints and the building of the Separation Wall. Corruption within the PA, weak leadership under Arafat’s successor Mahmoud Abbas and conflict between Fatah (Arafat’s party) and Hamas has increased disillusionment.
- HAMAS** The Islamist group successfully campaigned on an anti-corruption platform in the 2006 parliamentary elections. An international boycott of their government and splits within the Palestinians left Hamas in sole control of Gaza. The movement has been at the forefront of suicide attacks against Israel and continued to fire rockets into Israel while under blockade conditions. Israel launched a military campaign against Hamas in Gaza in December 2008. Hamas survived the attacks and its reconciliation with Fatah remained out of reach.
- DISILLUSIONMENT AMONG ISRAELIS** The failure of the Oslo Process and return to violence with the second Intifada was seen by some Israelis as proof that there is no Palestinian partner to make peace with. Israeli society appears to be more militant after the Summer War in Lebanon in 2006, leading to the Gaza campaign in 2008/2009 and the election of the right-wing Netanyahu government. An increase in the influence of religious nationalism is also affecting the army and Israeli political discourse.

A Christian View of Israel

Dr Calvin L Smith

Christian responses to the Israel-Palestinian conflict are sharply polarised into pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian camps. Polarised positions are not very constructive, while their extreme rhetoric makes moving the debate forward difficult. Meanwhile, selective use of the Bible on both sides, picking out verses to support their view, is unhelpful. Such mining of the Bible for proof texts is not a very sound method of biblical interpretation, allowing people to make the Bible say whatever they want.

But there is another approach to the Bible and the current conflict. This method, known as biblical theology, traces the overarching narrative running through the Bible, interpreting the Bible's individual themes, books, and passages in light of that central thread. A central biblical theme is "Israel", which is well-represented across both Testaments (more so than other themes, such as creation, baptism, or communion). Israel is mentioned or alluded to about 3000 times in the Bible; the title "God of Israel" appears about 200 times; Jesus' miracles caused people to glorify this God of Israel (eg Jn 12:13), and Jesus is described as the "consolation of Israel" (Lk 2:25, 32). Moreover, a fifth of Paul's letter to the Romans, the New Testament book so central to Christian theology, is devoted to God's continued dealings with ethnic Israel.

An important book highlighting this theme of Israel is *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, by the former Princeton scholar Kendall Soulen. But here's the interesting thing: though Soulen focuses on God's continued dealings with Jews, he is *not* a Christian Zionist, demonstrating that there are alternatives to the polarised views mentioned.

So what does the Bible have to say about Israel? Briefly, the Jews are to be God's people in perpetual covenant with Him. This nation of priests, known as "God's servant", will be a blessing to the Gentiles. Moreover, in his lengthy discussion of ethnic Israel in Romans the apostle Paul states categorically that God has not rejected His people (11:1). He then offers an analogy of Israel as a cultivated olive tree, whereby Gentile believers (a wild olive) are grafted in to Israel, not vice-versa. Thus, the Bible presents Israel – the Jewish people – as God's *historical* people, to reveal and bring about His salvific *historical* plan, fulfilled through an *historical* Jewish Messiah. Given how God

This nation of priests, known as "God's servant", will be a blessing to the Gentiles

has worked through history in this way, how then can He ditch his historical people so cavalierly? Such a position makes little sense in light of a biblical theology approach.

The view "God has not finished with the Jewish people" finds a long and respected tradition in Church history. Yet it does not mean one must take an "Israel right or wrong" position when it comes to the current conflict. After all, if biblical Israel sinned how can we maintain modern Israel does

not? Importantly, too, the theological view that God elects a particular people prepares the way for acknowledging God's special dealings with another nation, the Arab people, by virtue of God's covenant with Hagar (the Hagaric Covenant).

Importantly, focusing on the election of the Jewish *people* rather than the *land* permits me to consider the possibility of exchanging some land for peace (though pragmatically I believe this unrealistic at present, as the Gaza pull-out demonstrated). Of course, if one believes the Jews remain God's chosen people, this will have a bearing on how one views modern Israel, which is after all a Jewish state. But it does not necessarily translate into unbending, uncritical support for the State of Israel or prohibit the exchange of land for peace on theological grounds.



Photo © CC reway2007

But if Christians are to step back and eschew an "Israel right or wrong" position, the other side must also reassess its own unbending and untenable view that "Israel is always wrong". Singling out God's historic people as the primary (and even, for some, the only) cause of the conflict is unhelpful. It merely contributes to the polarisation of Christian opinion, making consensus quite impossible. Meanwhile, overly negative or pejorative Christian portrayals of Israel make sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the Jewish people incredibly difficult.

Judaism's claim to the land, settler activ-

ity, the view that Israel exists on Muslim land, and Islamist desires to redraw a Middle East map without Israel, all indicate that this conflict is essentially theological in nature. I remain unconvinced, then, that the conflict will be resolved soon or through exclusively political means. But the churches can move this debate forward among themselves, leaving the language of polarisation far behind. The alternative is ever shriller tribalism.

For further details of my view see www.calvinlsmith.com.

Biblical Perspectives on Israel and Palestine and How These Relate to the Church

Revd Chris Rose

Discussing Biblical perspectives on Israel/Palestine often means thinking and debating about theologies of the land, eschatology, and Christian-Jewish relations.¹ I want to suggest that this misses a vital question: what are the Biblical perspectives on Palestine and how do these relate to the church? In other words, what is our theology of the Palestinians?

Of crucial relevance to this question and its answer is the Palestine Kairos document launched in December 2009, and co-authored by over a dozen senior inter-denominational Palestinian Christian leaders and theologians.²

The declaration is addressed to Palestinians, Israelis, and “Christian brothers and sisters in the Churches around the world”, and is intended to be “a word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering”, delivered at a “moment of truth”. It is inspired by a similar call made by a group of South African Christians in the 1980s, when they said that “The time has come...It is the Kairos or moment of truth not only for apartheid but also for the Church.”

The document declares “that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God”, distorting “the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation”.

What is our theology of the Palestinians?

The Kairos Palestine document addresses the Church in the West, and does not shy away from criticising those “who use the Bible to threaten our existence as Christian and Muslim Palestinians” and “attach a biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of our rights”.

The declaration also celebrates the “prophetic” mission of the Church “to speak the Word of God courageously, honestly and lovingly in the local context and in the midst of daily events”, and to “stand alongside” the “oppressed”.

This message from the Church in Palestine is critical if we are to understand God’s promises to Israelis and Palestinians today.

For what does God say to the Palestinian people after 40 years of occupation, when the facts on the ground on the small strip of land called the West Bank include the Separation Wall, checkpoints, house demolitions, restrictions on travel and massive settlement blocs?

What does God say to the Palestinian people after 60 years as refugees?

What does God say, for people living in Gaza today, blockaded and trapped, when a UN investigation declares that during Operation Cast Lead war crimes were committed by both sides—and particularly levels strong criticism at the Israeli army after 1,400 people were killed and 3,500 injured— and is ignored?



Demolished Palestinian home, East Jerusalem. Photo: © CCjenniferlisa

For Israeli society which has become fractured by years of enforcing occupation and which longs for security and peace. What does God say? What does God say to all of the victims in Palestine and Israel? And what value do God's words have to us and to the church

in Palestine – which is contracting rapidly and asks for our support?

The Bible says some very simple and vital truths which cut through the theologies that so often dominate our discussions.

God created humankind in his own image

(every single person whether Jewish, Arab, Israeli or Palestinian)

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

Love your neighbour as yourself

Not a single hair on your head will be harmed without the father knowing

I the Lord love justice

The Earth belongs to the Lord

Blessed are the peacemakers

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness/justice

Love your enemies

My peace I leave with you

You are the body of Christ

These are the promises which cut through our need to theologise and must motivate us in responding to injustice and in calling for a just peace.

¹ For example, see the Bethlehem Bible College conference, Easter 2010. There is also the work of Stephen Sizer, Colin Chapman and Barbara Rossing.

² Kairos Palestine document, www.kairospalestine.ps.

Summary of Discussion at the Concordis International Consultation, Cambridge, 19 September 2009

by Concordis International staff

The following points are taken from discussion by the participants at the September consultation of the content that is presented elsewhere in this booklet. While the context of these stand-alone points should be clear, it is inevitable that some may appear disjointed. Nevertheless, we think it worthwhile to present some of the ideas, often thoughtfully expressed, that are not otherwise aired in this booklet. The views belong, of course, to those who expressed them, rather than necessarily to Concordis International.

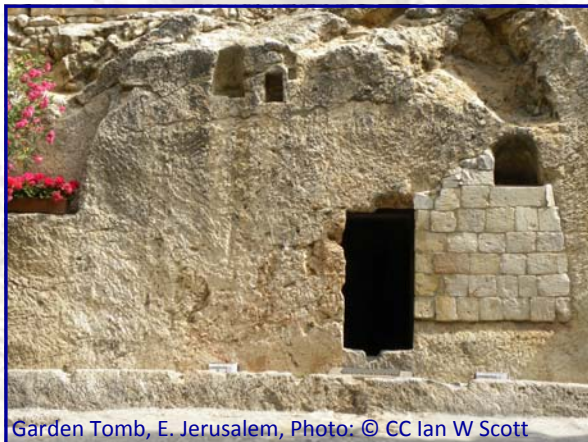
- ✘ The Palestinian Church was seen to have faced a rapid decline in numbers in recent years, as many Palestinian Christians are choosing to leave the region.
- ✘ Discrimination was seen as a significant issue in the UK, whether in the form of anti-Semitism or discrimination against Muslims is now more prevalent. The real or perceived anti-Judaism of the Christian scriptures was also discussed.
- ✘ It was noted that UK Christian Zionism is rather different from its American counterpart: the former is based on a covenantalist approach (i.e. God retains a relationship with his covenant people), the latter more end-times related.
- ✘ It can be theologically consistent to hold that “God has not finished with the Jewish people”, that He is a God of love, compassion and justice and that He has plans for other groups of people too.
- ✘ Portrayals of each ‘side’ should always be based on the very best examples – comparing ‘best with best’ – and not resort to caricatures of positions in order to win the debate.
- ✘ Many Palestinian and Arab Israeli Christians feel alienated from Christians in the West and cannot identify with their viewpoints.
- ✘ Relationships between different church traditions within Jerusalem are not as polarised as might be thought. There are powerful examples of churches from the ends of the spectrum worshipping together.
- ✘ Christians in the UK should be neither too complacent nor too pessimistic: sitting with discomfort as well as with hope. There is power in Christians working with a spirit of repentance, confessing to one another face to face and admitting the pain that we have caused.

✘ There may be times when Christians need to risk their theological careers and engage with those of opposite views, just as Jesus laid down his life for the Kingdom.

✘ What are the limitations of dialogue between UK Churches? Some argued that dialogue itself does not provide much hope for building peace, unless it

stimulates action that challenges the unjust structures underpinning a conflict. Others emphasised that the benefits of the dialogue are reduced if those involved are unwilling to modify their positions from the outset. Acting kindly, displaying gentleness and building friendships – both with members of UK Churches and with people in Israel and Palestine – are some of the most effective ways of making progress towards peace.

✘ Since Christians are unlikely to ever be of one mind on the issue of Israel-Palestine, it is particularly important to affirm that those with a different



Garden Tomb, E. Jerusalem, Photo: © CC Ian W Scott

perspective on the conflict are equally men and women of God. We should begin by embodying the peace that we hope to see in Israel-Palestine, particularly through the way in which we relate to one another. Ultimately, though, UK churches cannot solve this conflict: only those directly involved in it can do so.

✘ One widely supported proposal was for a more balanced approach to Holy Land tours by Churches visiting from the UK, involving visits to sites and Christian communities on both sides of the conflict.

A Few Resources

(not mentioned elsewhere)

Websites

www.prayerforpeace.org.uk

www.cfi.org.uk

www.amostrust.org

www.marcgopin.com

Books

Whose Promised Land and Whose Holy City, Colin Chapman

Peacemakers: Building Stability in a Complex World, Peter Dixon

The Israel-Palestine Conflict, James Gelvin

Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives, eds Philip Johnston and Peter Walker

Working Together towards Peaceful Co-existence

Geoffrey Smith and Jerry Marshall

Daniel Barenboim, who founded an orchestra of Israeli and Palestinian musicians with the late Palestinian author Edward Said, said this at a concert recorded in Ramallah in 2005:

“It is our belief that the destinies of these two peoples, Israel and Palestine, are inextricably linked; and therefore the welfare, sense of justice and happiness of one will inevitably be that of the other.”

There is a feeling that we can either try to bless Israel or try to bless the Palestinians but we cannot do both. Barenboim is saying something quite different: you cannot bless Israel without also blessing Palestinians.

In the same year, a group from Transformational Business Network (TBN) were worshipping with Palestinian Christians in a church in Bethlehem. All had tears in their eyes. Although all church members had suffered from the conflict, the church is committed to a tough message of forgiveness and love. There was a sense of being close to revival.

As the group reflected and prayed they felt God saying that Christian disunity on Israel was blocking the outpouring of the Spirit in the Holy Land. *Every Kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, every city or house divided against itself will not stand.* (Mat 12: 25).

Part of the problem of disunity is making wrong assumptions about what “the other side” believe. It is assumed that they are ignoring Biblical prophecy, or ignoring the Biblical emphasis on justice, or that views are coloured by racism. Of course there are differences in interpretation but our impression from experience of working together is

surprise at how few these differences have been.

Part of the problem is misinformation. Propaganda is a key weapon in times of war. In peace, different newspapers present completely different versions of the same incident. Different communities develop their own urban myths and distortions; because we don’t move between different communities of belief our assumptions are not challenged. And some misinformation is deliberately planted via the internet.

Finally, part of the problem is that simplification can make issues seem black and white when actually they are more complex. For example, the inheritance promised to the Israelites also applies to settled aliens (Ezekiel 47:22). Furthermore, some geneticists tell us that Palestinians are as much descendants of Isaac as of Ishmael (in terms of DNA they are indistinguishable from Israelis and both groups are distinct from peninsular Arabs).

Civil society is at work building bridges between the communities in sports, art, music and education. Jerry and TBN are using business to reach across the divide, initiating a programme to help Palestinians form high-potential technology-based businesses with links to the Israeli technology sector. When jobs create hope and “the enemy” become partners, personal relationships develop and begin to break down barriers. Geoffrey and Christian Friends of Israel are supporting Israeli hospitals where Jewish doctors and nurses provide open-heart surgery for Arab children from Gaza and Iraq without charge. This is where the churches need to be active in reconciliation, supporting the efforts of

*a tough message of
forgiveness and love*

civil society to bridge divides and not acting as cheerleaders to reinforce adversarial stereotypes.

Take one example: One Voice, a grass-roots organisation with over 650,000 Israeli and Palestinian members, has begun an international programme to tackle polarisation in universities and communities globally. They say: "International opinions on the conflict are often more extreme than those who live within it". One Voice commissioned a study by Dr Colin Irwin from Liverpool University. With experience of the Irish situation, he devised a questionnaire put to 500 Israelis and 600 Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank.

The results were published in April 2009. 78% of Palestinians and 73% of Israelis believed it essential or desirable that a "peace agreement must lead to living side by side as good neighbours." Only a minority on either side wanted to see two completely separate states without interaction. 74% of Palestinians and 58% of Israelis thought it essential or desirable "that civil society should get more involved in the peace process". This is where the churches need to be at work in civil society to support cross-community organisations and to encourage dialogue.

The top five items listed by Palestinian and Israeli respondents as the most significant problems of substance were largely mirror images of each other's lists. One Voice concludes that the major concerns of one party need to be addressed on the other side. They are active in arranging town hall meetings in Israel and Palestine, at each of which one taboo issue will be discussed in the process of conflict resolution, building mo-

mentum and popular consensus.

Few of us will be sitting round the negotiating table, but in the 'peace ecology' the churches can have a supportive role in people-to-people peace-making. So we conclude with some specific constructive suggestions:

- 1 *Help people to be informed and hear both the mainstream Israeli and the Palestinian narratives. When you hold conferences, try to get a view from both communities.*
- 2 *In your publications avoid stereotypes – all Israelis are not land-grabbers, all Palestinians are not terrorists.*
- 3 *Try to link with indigenous organisations in Israel/Palestine that are bridges across the conflict – e.g. : www.onevoicemovement.org and www.musalaha.org .*
- 4 *When you take tour groups make sure you hear ordinary people and leaders representative of both sides. The Centre for New Diplomacy can facilitate this: www.cfnd.eu.*
- 5 *Try to arrange home visits where your group can meet people and ask questions in their homes. The Kibbutz at Ein Gev will do this for tour groups staying there and Beit Al-Liqa in Bethlehem is well worth contacting www.beitliqa.org.*
- 6 *If you have business or professional skills, use them to be a catalyst for peace by contacting TBN www.tbnetwork.org.*

Finally, remember that peacemaking is not appeasement or a win by one side or the other; it takes hard work and assertive co-operation but the outcome will be gains for both sides. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God".

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Musalaha and the Churches

Dr Salim Munayer



In all the travelling and speaking that I do, I see more and more that churches are divided. Congregants seem split along emotionally charged lines regarding the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Listening to questions, charges and accusations, I observe that two main themes usually emerge and are hotly debated: the historical account of the conflict and its theological implications. Often, these two are mixed together.

Generally speaking, most Christians can be divided into two camps: the Christian Zionist camp, adhering to one form or another of Dispensational Theology, and the Social Justice camp, comprising a number of different positions but finding strongest expression in Palestinian Liberation Theology. Both sides have positive contributions to make, but both are also somewhat problematic, when the goal is reconciliation.

For example, Christian Zionists, who have become very politically influential in the West, especially in the USA, have been able to reintroduce God into the discussion on history. Through their theology they feel the urgency of eschatological matters and prophecy, viewing God as the mover of history, whereas in many circles God has been relegated to personal matters only. They have also brought the Jewish people and their role in scripture and in revelation back into the consciousness of

Christianity, challenging much of the centuries-old anti-Semitism that was present in some supersessionist theologies.

However, because of their emphasis on their particular interpretation of history and prophecy, many of the political conclusions they draw are dubious at best, and at worst enter the realm of intolerant racism. This is because of their particular interpretation of the principles of election and the sovereignty of God, which ignores other aspects of God's nature and can lead to a dangerous logic: the ends justify the means. God's promises are to be fulfilled, and anyone

two main themes usually emerge and are hotly debated

who stands in the way ceases to be a person and becomes an obstacle, an enemy of God. So some adherents of Dispensational Theology have

no room for a redemptive theology for the Palestinian people, and indeed many even deny their existence. When such a strong emphasis is placed on the chosenness of a people as it relates to the End Times and prophecy, the theological importance and human rights of other people recede into the background.

On the other side of the divide we have Christians, mostly Protestant, who draw their inspiration from the Old Testament prophets and call for social and political justice, as well as spiritual renewal. Palestinian Liberation Theology has led

the charge, above all else demanding justice for the Palestinian people. They have also proved an unmistakable and irreplaceable voice in the conflict, reminding us that there is more to God's nature than election and sovereignty: mercy, compassion, love and above all justice. They also remind us that we cannot presume to do God's will while simultaneously oppressing people, that our means reflect our ends, and that the Palestinian people cannot be ignored.

Unfortunately, this approach is also rather narrow and not conducive to reconciliation. By emphasizing justice to the exclusion of all else, much of great importance is lost. From this theological perspective, there is no room for God to move in history (since people are the history-makers), less room for prophecy, and no room for the historical and religious connection of the Jewish people to the land. The emphasis is on politics and advocacy, not on people and certainly not on reconciliation.

This is a problem that plagues both sides. Many followers of Dispensational Theology refuse fellowship with those who do not accept their interpretation of prophecy. Commonly, followers of Palestinian Liberation Theology avoid all interaction with "the oppressor" until liberation is achieved. Believers from both sides have been drafted into the conflict instead of acting as a bridge across the gap of suspicion and hatred. The goal of Musalaha is to bring people from both sides together with no

preconditions. We seek to act as a bridge, and to provide a forum for people from both sides to meet together, have fellowship together, disagree and challenge one another, but ultimately reconcile with each other, without ignoring the conflict and its issues.

To this end, Musalaha hosts a variety of encounter programmes that bring Israelis and Palestinians together: summer camps for children, youth and young adult desert encounter trips, and women's meetings. Musalaha is also developing a Theology of Reconciliation to address the needs of both sides. This will include (but not be limited to)

Believers from both sides have been drafted into the conflict

recognition of the unique role the Jewish people have played and their historical and religious attachment to the land, the cry for justice on the Palestinian side and their historical and religious attachment to the land. The aim is to create a theological foundation on which mutual respect and love can be built.

An exclusive focus on the End Times and fulfilment of prophecy, or on justice and liberation, can never be the full picture. Pursuing either one alone, outside the context of the cross, will lead to violence, exclusion and rejection. We must have room for each other in our theology.

Musalaha's central aim is unity through Christ's love and through the cross, as Jesus called for in John 17:21, saying, "that they [all believers] all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

The Need for a Bridging Narrative on Israeli-Palestinian Tensions

Dr Richard Harvey

The several Christian approaches to the Middle East conflict may be mapped as a continuum. Whilst they appear polarised into pro-Arab and pro-Israeli positions, each is nuanced in its political analysis of the conflict, its theological interpretation of the issues of land, peace, security and justice, and its proposals for engagement and action. The variety of stakeholders in the conflict articulate different political and religious concerns. The voices that speak into the politics and theology of the conflict include:

Christians campaigning for justice for the Palestinians

(Ben White, Stephen Sizer, Colin Chapman, Christian Aid)

Christians campaigning for justice for the Palestinians, often labelled as ‘Christian anti-Zionists’, bring a strong critique of the legitimacy of the State of Israel, the Occupation of the Territories, and any theological justification for the Zionist project. Their historical analysis, political loyalties and theological interpretation challenge the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the Palestinians. They are seen as supersessionist in their attempt to deny the Jewish people today any continuity with the Israel of the Old Testament scriptures, either physically and politically, or in terms of salvation history.

Palestinian liberation theology (Naim Ateek, Sabeel)

This position constructs a theology of the Palestinian cause based on Liberation theology. Employing an approach that demythologizes the Zionist project and rejects a Dispensationalist or non-supersessionist reading of the Old Testament, it sees the Resurrection of Jesus as a prefiguring of the *Intifada* as a ‘rising again’ from the dust of Israeli oppression.

Israeli-Palestinian Ubuntu/reconciliation perspectives (Elias Chacour, Musalaha)

The organization Musalaha and the work of Palestinian Christian activists advocating non-violence and dialogue with Israeli and Messianic Jewish voices follows the approaches of Desmond Tutu and Miroslav Volf in inviting embrace rather than exclusion and calling for a communal response with all sides of the conflict involved in reconciliation and restorative justice.

Peacemakers and observers (Mennonites, Quakers and Concordis International)

These are outside agencies, some of whom monitor human rights abuses, check-



Photo © CC David55King

point violations, and offer legal help and representation on Palestinian detentions, property violations and settler claims. They operate from a Christian concern for justice and human rights. Others are involved in bringing the parties together to explore possibilities for peace and reconciliation.

Pro-Israel lobby groups, including Christian Zionist

(International Christian Embassy, Christian Friends of Israel, John Hagee)

Christian Zionists advocate political but not always uncritical support for the State of Israel on the grounds of their hermeneutic of Dispensational or Historic Premillennialism which view the return of the Jewish people to the Land as the fulfilment of prophecy. They give political support to Israel through advocacy, welfare, humanitarian aid, volunteering in Israel, their presence in the Land and public alignment with Israel. This is problematic to Palestinian Christians who feel marginalized, and to Israeli Messianic Jews, who are not recognized as brothers and sisters in Christ as this may jeopardize Christian Zionist recognition by Jewish authorities.

Messianic Jewish positions

(Lisa Loden, Baruch Maoz, David Friedman, David Stern)

Messianic Jews have a clear identification with their land and people, serving in the army, enduring terrorist attacks, and affirming the security and defence policies of their government. Their theology is variously Premillennial, Amillennial or studiedly agnostic on prophetic interpretation. Their identity as Jewish believers in Yeshua (Jesus) situates them in the context of conflict with a strong sense of divine purpose and mission. A Messianic Jewish theology of reconciliation needs to engage with the different stakeholders, as do the other approaches need to recognize and engage with them. This must be done at the level of both public engagement and theological reflection. Messianic Jews, like their Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters, find this a challenge for several reasons. Their loyalty to the Jewish people and the State of Israel is already under suspicion because they believe in Yeshua as Messiah. This problematises their rights as citizens, their status as immigrants, and their ability to speak into the political debate.

What is also problematic is that all those involved in the conflict generally situate themselves on one side or the other of what Robert Rotberg characterizes as the

***the 'double helix'
of narratives***

'double helix' of narratives regarding Israel-Palestine – two contradictory perspectives on the conflict which both portray the opposite 'side' as guilty and itself as the victim. In this context there is a vital need to construct a 'bridging narrative'

which begins to bring together the various understandings of the history and theology of the conflict and constructs workable options for the short and long-term future.

Engaging with the Land and People

Revd Mike Fuller

Each pastor is shaped by a lifetime of influences before he or she starts to consider Israel and Palestine. These might be the simple but profound impact of John's uncomfortable references to "the Jews"; the unconscious assimilation of theological perspectives from those who parented us in faith; or the impact of those with powerful public media-focused ministries.

In ministry, a pastor often encounters those with strongly held views on "Israel". These brothers and sisters are usually both deeply convinced of their standpoint, and vocal in their expression of it. Consequently, one's preaching may be examined through the prism of one perspective or another; perhaps prompting vulnerability in a pastor who as yet has not addressed these issues in depth, or a desire to avoid future conflict by avoiding such issues.

However, the responsibility of pastoral care compels us to nurture all – including the difficult, the dogmatic and the divisive! In addition, our responsibility to preach God's word demands engagement with both sacred text and with the dramas of contemporary conflict. How, then, can we begin to engage with Land and People in this cause?

Awareness

A first consideration might be our own self-awareness. How do I think of the Jewish people, in the light of the gospel accounts? When I seek to explain, for example, the events that lead to the crucifixion of Jesus, how do I picture those who sought His execution? In my "day job" as a teacher of Religious Studies, I am careful to refer both to the Roman political motivation for the elimination of a potential rebel leader, and also the views of *some Jewish religious leaders of the time*. Such careful phraseology is also needed in our thinking, and in the pulpit. Alternatively, the Ishmael story of *the Ishmael story may have shaped our picture of "the Arabs" in ways never intended by biblical writers* may have shaped our picture of "the Arabs" in ways never intended by biblical writers.

the Ishmael story may have shaped our picture of "the Arabs" in ways never intended by biblical writers

We are also well advised to review what we learned in theological study. I recently heard the eminent

scholar Geza Vermes asked about the two most profound changes in his lifetime's study. The first was, unsurprisingly, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The second, though, was the significant change in Christian scholarly writing following the Holocaust, from an anti-Semitism evident in Christian writing from the Church Fathers onwards. For some of us, deeper exploration of our own thinking may lead to a personal act of confession, or some sort of identification with the sins of our forefathers.



Galilee. Photo: © CC hoyasmeg

vite a secular Jewish friend who passionately affirms the Jewish State. In Bethlehem, I choose a Palestinian Christian friend who speaks movingly of how his countrymen contributed to the building of the Wall that so harmed their own economy. Both are listened to, and both are loved - and their hearers develop “ears to hear”.

Affirmation and Affection

Apprenticeship

Many of us yearn to picture more clearly the life and ministry of Jesus; and visiting the lands where he lived and taught is immensely fruitful for this. When I first went to Israel, I was thrilled to experience the land, and encountered some delightful Messianic believers whose insights, and worship, were an enormous help to me. In subsequent visits I met some who described themselves as “Palestinian Arab Christians”. Their humility and godliness in suffering impacted and challenged me. My experience as a pastor tells me that each individual story of saving encounter with God is to be treasured. We will be far more effective apprentices for the Kingdom when we hear a range of authentic experience – and teach others to do the same. When I take pilgrim groups to Israel and Palestine, I now ask two different guides to instruct us. In Israel, I in-

In the UK, most of us now recognise that those in other “streams” of the Church of Jesus are fully our sisters and brothers. Thankfully, it is now rare to hear folk lauding their own tradition by comparison with the caricature of another. This more gracious perception of others allows the debate of themes andologies, but in the context of affirming others who - like us - are usually doing their level best to serve our Father faithfully. Best is compared with best, not best with worst.

When we engage with the Church of Jesus in Israel and Palestine, we will learn much from them. Could it be that we might, in return, bring to them a most precious gift – by modelling a mutual honouring and love that we have begun to learn in our denominational context, but that some have still to perceive fully in Jerusalem, in Israel and in Palestine?

Core Christian Principles Common to All

Ben White

In this short piece, I will attempt to identify some core Christian principles of relevance when approaching the conflict in Palestine/Israel. The importance of beginning with shared values is that it can be a good foundation for going on to identify and pursue particular goals.

One of the most fundamental beliefs we have as Christians is that every human being is created in the image of God.

‘So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.’ (Genesis 1:27)

The profound truth that we have all been “made in God’s likeness” (James 3:9) is made even more potent by the fact that this dignity is inherent to every human being, regardless of divisions like race and class (“there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female”, Galatians 3:28).

The second shared principle I would like to emphasise is the Biblical understanding that it is justice that “will produce lasting peace and security” (Isaiah 32:17, CEV). But why is this exactly? Why do people talk about a ‘just peace’? Surely peace is simply the absence of violence?

The reason why “justice” leads to “peace and security” is two-fold. Firstly, a peace without justice can be unsustainable. In a conflict dynamic between two peoples, unless one group is annihilated or effec-

tively destroyed, then the enduring injustice will be a spur for continued fighting.

Secondly, it is crucial to remember the full meaning of the Hebrew

word for ‘peace’ in the Bible – *shalom*. Shalom is not a ‘negative peace’, meaning simply a lack of war. Rather, shalom is something much richer, more profound – “[it] is not just the absence of hostility, but ‘peace with justice’.”

This Christian understanding of a ‘just peace’ then, is not just a ceasefire. It is the vision of the Prophet Micah, where everyone “will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid” (Micah 4:4).

This is the kind of just peace so sorely lacking in Palestine/Israel. The Palestine Kairos document authors wrote how “the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God” as it distorts “the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation”.



Photo © CC—Nagillum

shalom is something much richer, more profound

Every Christian should oppose the killing of Israelis in restaurants; every Christian should oppose the killing of Palestinians and the humiliating subjugation of a military occupation.

Yet we do not take steps towards a just peace without being realistic about the root causes of the conflict, and the structural imbalance between Israel and the stateless, exiled Palestinians. In the occupied West Bank, where there is one rule for Jewish settlers and another for Palestinians, human dignity is being trampled on every time a Palestinian home is demolished, land is confiscated, and permission to travel in one's own country denied.

*peace must be built
on justice*

Based on our understanding of how God has created human beings equal in worth and dignity, and the fact that it is justice which brings peace, all Christians should – and *must* – be able to speak up for human rights in Palestine/Israel. These “common principles” mean support for a settlement “built on equality and sharing”. As Christian leaders said in May 2008, there must be protection for “the individual and collective rights of Jews and Palestinians in the Holy Land”.

These common values must lead to action. One such example is ‘A Just Peace for Palestine’, a grassroots campaign for all those who want to be involved in supporting a just resolution to the conflict. A core belief of this Amos Trust initiative is that a just peace for Palestine will also mean peace and security for Jewish Israelis, and that it is a critical time for churches to speak up – and act.

That is one possibility. To conclude, I will summarise these “core Christian principles common to all”, and their significance. Firstly, every human being has inherent dignity and equal worth – Jew or Palestinian – and furthermore, peace must be built on justice. Secondly, these Biblical values lead us, or should lead us, to a practical commitment to the protection of human rights in Palestine/Israel, and prophetic protest when they are abused.



Photo: Ben White. Christian Palestinian with rubble placed by Israeli army to prevent vehicular access to his farm

The Contributors

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Ben White is a writer specialising in Palestine/Israel, who has visited the Holy Land regularly since 2003. His first book, *'Israeli Apartheid: A Beginner's Guide'*, was published in 2009. He is working with Amos Trust on the 'A Just Peace for Palestine' campaign.

ABOUT CONCORDIS INTERNATIONAL

Concordis International is a British non-profit organisation that seeks to achieve long-term transformation of relationships across conflict boundaries, by engaging all constituencies in sustained examination of issues of common interest, moving beyond the lines of confrontation to build on shared purpose and explore new possibilities for peace. Rather than becoming involved in official peace negotiations, we aim to build relationships of trust that pave the way for peace or contribute to post-conflict nation-building. The work is underpinned by values – such as justice and equity – that are shared by those of many faiths and traditions.

Concordis' primary methodology involves a series of informal, low-profile consultations in a neutral venue, attended by key individuals linked to their respective leaders and constituencies. Attending in a personal capacity away from the public and media eye, participants are not under pressure to maintain a party line. Consultations are constructed on a solid foundation of in-depth research into structural causes of conflict and economic and social factors necessary to sustainable peace. A wide network of academic contacts ensures that the research is of high quality.

Under the name Newick Park Initiative (NPI), the Concordis International team was instrumental in South Africa in establishing confidential dialogue between leading members of the ANC and the white establishment, contributing to the peaceful ending of apartheid. In the aftermath of Rwanda's 1994 genocide, NPI played a critical role in resolving issues of agriculture and justice, successfully bringing together senior Tutsis and Hutus to consider Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and traditional *gacaca* courts. In 1999, at the invitation of senior Sudanese, Concordis (then Relationships Foundation International) and the African Renaissance Institute launched the Sudan Peace-Building Programme. Subsequently, Concordis responded to Sudanese requests to remain engaged, through facilitating informal dialogue on 'post-conflict' priorities, consolidating Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement, supporting inter-faith co-operation and contributing to the resolution of regional issues like Darfur and Eastern Sudan.

In addition to informal consultations, Concordis adopts other means of furthering peace processes – such as publications and capacity-building workshops – though always adopting a non-partisan approach. Areas other than Sudan where our peacebuilding work is in progress or in a development stage include Kenya, Afghanistan and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The work of Concordis International is funded through contributions from private individuals, community groups, NGOs, grant-giving trusts and foundations, and government agencies.



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